

Statement on Signing the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act

November 30, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2116, the “Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act.” This comprehensive bill will improve a broad array of benefits and services for those to whom we owe our freedoms—our Nation’s veterans.

This bill is especially significant for its approach in the provision of enhanced extended-care services to veterans. It firmly establishes that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should accord the highest priority for nursing home care to the most severely disabled veterans and those needing care for service-connected disabilities. It will also ensure that veterans enrolled in the VA health care system receive noninstitutional, extended-care services, including geriatric evaluations and adult day health care.

The bill also expands opportunities for military retirees to utilize VA health care services, at Department of Defense (DoD) expense and in accordance with an agreement to be developed by DoD and VA. The DoD and VA will ensure this agreement allows for the provision of high-quality managed care and increased choice, in the most cost-effective manner for the Federal Government.

This bill includes many other important health care provisions. For example, H.R. 2116:

- Expands veterans’ eligibility for reimbursement of emergency care costs when VA

or other Federal health care facilities are not accessible.

- Extends and expands VA’s authority to provide health care services to victims of sexual trauma.
- Makes more active duty personnel eligible for VA substance dependency treatment.
- Authorizes VA to update the schedule of copayments charged for certain health care benefits to generate additional program funds.

I am also pleased that the bill will make it easier for surviving spouses of disabled former prisoners of war to qualify for survivor benefits; expand certain education benefit entitlements; extend VA’s authority to guarantee home loans for members of the Selected Reserve; and both extend and enhance programs for homeless veterans.

These are but the high points of a comprehensive bill that will enhance many benefits and services our veterans and their families justly deserve. I thank all who were involved in its passage.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 30, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2116, approved November 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106–117.

Statement on Signing the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1999

November 30, 1999

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2280, the “Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 1999,” which provides a 2.4 percent cost-of-living adjustment in benefits for service-disabled veterans and their surviving spouses and children. It provides for increased rates in payments of service-connected disability compensation to veterans who suffer

from service-related disabilities and in payments of dependency and indemnity compensation for the surviving spouses and children of service members and veterans whose deaths are service-related. The increased benefit rates will take effect on December 1, 1999. This legislation,

derived from an Administration proposal, ensures that the value of these well-deserved benefits will keep pace with increases in consumer prices.

As a country, we must remember those veterans who gave of themselves to assure the continued protection of this great Nation. The freedoms and liberty that we enjoy as citizens depend on the men and women in our Armed Forces. In a tangible way, this legislation ex-

presses the gratitude of the Nation for the sacrifices our veterans have unselfishly endured.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 30, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 2280, approved November 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106-118.

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah, 1999

November 30, 1999

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Hanukkah.

This joyous Festival of Lights commemorates the rededication of the Jews' Holy Temple by the Maccabees after their victory over oppression and the rekindling of the Temple's sacred oil lamp. That victory, recounted in ancient Jewish writings, is one of history's earliest recorded battles for religious freedom. More than two thousand years have passed since Judah the Maccabee and his courageous followers refused to reject their faith in God, their customs, and their religious traditions; but today people across

the globe still struggle for the freedom to worship according to their own conscience.

As Jews throughout America and around the world gather with family and friends to light the menorah and remember the miracle of God's presence in our lives and history, let us all give thanks for the blessed light of religious freedom in our nation. And let us be mindful, in our thoughts, prayers, and actions, of those who still must live in the shadow of oppression.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes to all for a memorable Hanukkah observance and for peace and joy in the coming year.

BILL CLINTON

Remarks at a "Stop the Violence" Benefit in Beverly Hills, California

November 30, 1999

Thank you very much. We can pass laws, but we can't fix this podium here. *[Laughter]* Maybe I'll stand up on it. How's that? *[Laughter]*

I love Whoopi Goldberg. The greatest thing about being President is that nearly anybody will come talk to you. *[Laughter]* Some will talk for you; some will talk against you; some will talk at you, but nearly anybody will come talk to you. And so I've had the honor of meeting all kinds of people from all walks of life.

But when I met Whoopi Goldberg—and I was already sort of a big fan, you know—but I looked at her, and I thought, now, there is a woman who will be my friend. *[Laughter]* You know, there have been times when I'm

sure my friendship has been somewhat embarrassing to her. *[Laughter]* And times when her jokes have caused me some discomfort in public. *[Laughter]* But I'm not a hypocrite about that. I'm with her through thick and thin. *[Laughter]* And she has certainly been with me though thick and thin.

Of all the people that I know, I continue to be amazed by how generous truly busy and successful people are. But Whoopi, you have been so generous to me and to my family and our administration, and in so doing, you've been generous to America. And I thank you for that.